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## Chapter II

### Embracing Enclosure

In early December 1563, at its twenty-fifth session, the Council of Trent turned its attention to reform of both male and female religious orders. The resulting chapter five of the Council's decrees stipulated that all communities of female religious should be strictly enclosed. Pointing out that it was renewing the constitution of Pope Boniface VIII, passed in 1298 and known as *Periculoso*, the Council commanded 'all bishops' to ensure that 'the enclosure of nuns be restored wherever it has been violated and that it be preserved where it has not been violated'. The bishops were told to press ahead with these measures regardless of any opposition, 'even summoning for this purpose, if need be, the aid of the secular arm.' Putting it bluntly, the Council fathers declared that 'no nun shall after her profession be permitted to go out of the monastery, even for a brief period under any pretext whatever, except for a lawful reason to be approved by the bishop ... Neither shall anyone, of whatever birth or condition, sex or age, be permitted, under penalty of excommunication to be incurred ipso facto, to enter the enclosure of the monastery without the written permission of the bishop or the superior.'<sup>1</sup> These decrees were affirmed by Pope Pius V's bull, *Circa Pastoralis*, three years later.<sup>2</sup> It was under these censures that the new convents founded in exile operated. After a postulant's arrival at the convent as discussed in the previous chapter, it was this enclosed environment that defined their new life. Following a few months as a postulant, the community, usually in the form of a chapter meeting, would then decide whether to accept the candidate as a novice. As prescribed by the Council of Trent, the individual would also be interviewed by a representative of the local ordinary to establish their identity and origins, as well to ascertain the credibility of their vocation, plus that it had in no way been coerced. If successful, the candidate would be clothed and take a new name in religion. After their novitiate, which usually lasted a year, the same process of internal convent discussion and external interview took place before an individual proceeded to their final vows and profession as a nun.<sup>3</sup> With their new surroundings defined

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<sup>1</sup> H. J. Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent: English Translation* (Rockford, IL: Tan, 1978), pp. 220–1.

<sup>2</sup> R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1st edition 1998, 2nd edition 2005), pp. 33–4.

<sup>3</sup> For the selection process, see Caroline Bowden, 'Missing Members: Selection and Governance in the English Convents in Exile', in Caroline Bowden and James E. Kelly (eds.), *The English Convents in Exile, 1600-1800: Communities, culture and identity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 53–68. For the different stages towards final

by enclosure, it meant that from this point on they would not, in all likelihood, ever return home again. This chapter will consider the relationship between English women religious and enclosure as a symbol of English conventual commitment to the initiatives of the Catholic Reformation. It opens by exploring what enclosure actually meant for the English convents, before considering the ways in which this strict separation from the world was in reality breached through a number of weaknesses inherent in the Council's teachings. The final section of the chapter argues that, far from the frequently repeated claim that all women religious in Catholic Europe reacted against the imposition of enclosure, English women religious actually embraced it with fervour, becoming known as standard bearers of Catholic teaching on this matter. As such, the English convents self-consciously outstripped their religious neighbours in their commitment to the teachings of the Church Militant.

## I

Based as they were in officially Catholic countries, English women religious were subject to the rules surrounding strict enclosure issued by the Council of Trent. Moreover, these rules were to be enforced by both ecclesiastical and secular authorities if they were met with resistance. It is understandable, therefore, that these rules were reflected in the English convents' statutes and constitutions.<sup>4</sup> For example, the Louvain Augustinians recorded the ordinances for the cloister at the beginning of their council book. Point number ten stated:

No person of what quallitie soever may come into the inclosure except those whoe are named in the statutes with out express licence from the artch bishop or the vicare general which licence the Prioress shall not require without consente of the conventuall sisters. And the sayde licence being obtained shall be made use of butt only for one tyme unless it be other wise expressed in the written licence.<sup>5</sup>

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profession and the literature surrounding it, see Laurence Lux-Sterritt, 'Spirituality', *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800*, gen. ed. Caroline Bowden, vol. 2 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), pp. 1–94.

<sup>4</sup> Claire Walker gives examples from the Ghent Benedictines, Paris Augustinians and Franciscan convent founded at Brussels: Claire Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe: English Convents in France and the Low Countries* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 50–1.

<sup>5</sup> James E. Kelly (ed.), 'Convent management', *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800*, gen. ed. Caroline Bowden, vol. 5 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), p. 376.

Adherence to the rules was also evident in the very architecture of the convents: high walls encased the convent perimeter; windows were placed where it was difficult to see in or out; goods were passed into the enclosure via a turn; entry was by one door, the keys to which were kept by the portress.<sup>6</sup> The Paris Conceptionists went a step further. In their Rule, it was decreed that, ‘the better to keep their Inclosure’, the convent ‘shall have a door placed on high, and a portable ladder to mount up to it, which shall always hang up, or be laid aside,’ apart from when someone needed to enter the building for an approved reason.<sup>7</sup> Maintenance of this rule-enforcing architecture was a regular preoccupation of English women religious. For example, Margaret Ellerker, procuratrix at the Brussels Dominicans, informed the community’s English agent, Mannock Strickland, in January 1735 of ‘an unexpected expence’ caused by a recent storm. She reported that one enclosure wall was completely down and another very badly damaged. The community had provided for temporary repairs but more substantial work was required once the weather allowed. By June of that year, the work had been completed and Ellerker was asking Strickland to secure the £125 it had cost to rebuild the enclosure walls.<sup>8</sup> In 1719, needing to repair their chapel dedicated to St Michael, the Rouen Poor Clares took the opportunity to bolster a sagging enclosure wall by building the new chapel tight up against it.<sup>9</sup>

As new foundations of the Catholic Reformation, adherence to the rules of enclosure universally decreed by the Council of Trent was of paramount importance to the English convents, even at the earliest stage of an institution’s establishment. For example, soon after their arrival in February 1609 at the buildings that would serve as their convent, the Louvain Augustinians sought to be enclosed so that ‘worldly folks mite no more come into the house to them’. Thus, they had a grate made of little wooden rails to part the room ‘in the midst with boards so that it served both for the worldly folks and for the nuns also.’<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Nicky Hallett, *Lives of Spirit: English Carmelite Self-Writing of the Early Modern Period* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 241–52; Elizabeth A. Leffeldt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain: The Permeable Enclosure* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 4; Sandra Weddle, “‘Women in wolves’ mouths”: Nuns’ Reputations, Enclosure and Architecture at the Convent of La Murate in Florence’, in Helen Hills (ed.), *Architecture and the Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 121.

<sup>7</sup> J. Gillow, J. and R. Trappes-Lomax (eds.), *The Diary of the ‘Blue Nuns’*, Catholic Record Society, vol. 8 (London, 1910), p. 313.

<sup>8</sup> Margaret Xaveria Ellerker to Mannock Strickland, 26 January 1735, 4 June 1735: Mapledurham, Blount MSS, C 41/182, C 41/185, printed in Kelly, ‘Convent Management’, pp. 218, 220.

<sup>9</sup> Caroline Bowden, ‘History Writing’, *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800*, gen. ed. Caroline Bowden, vol. 1 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), p. 231.

<sup>10</sup> Douai Abbey, Archives of St Monica’s, Louvain and St Augustine’s, Newton Abbot, C2, p. 74.

Huge ceremonial weight was placed on the enclosing of a convent. This was reflected in the ceremonies devised by members of the English Carmelite communities when they were tasked with founding new Carmels. In 1643/44, the Antwerp-based Anne Leveson was chosen to make a new foundation at Dusseldorf and she duly copied out the ceremonial for the enclosure of a convent. Before the convent's enclosure, the women religious were to adorn the church and altar, plus make sure a monstrance had been sent to the local cathedral or principal church for conveying the consecrated host the following day. On the actual day of enclosure, all the religious were brought to the said church for Mass, fully dressed in their habits. After benediction had been performed at the end of Mass, the nuns processed out, two by two, led by a priest who carried the monstrance from the cathedral to the enclosure gate. The procession was to be accompanied by hymns, bells and 'other demonstrations of joy and triumph, the more the better'. The priest then halted at the entrance to enclosure and the nuns passed either side into their buildings. Receiving benediction, the gate was then closed on the nuns, Leveson noting, 'Then your great bell doth first ring, I doubt not but other churches will also accommodate so happy a procession with ringing when you pass.' Now in enclosure, the first Mass was to be celebrated immediately: 'you are all to communicate that so your first sustenance in yr inclosure may be the food of eternal life'. Adding that the conurbation's principal people should take part in the procession to the convent, Leveson finished by remarking, 'After all the ceremonys ended & you alone, you congratulate each other in our dear desired enclosure.'<sup>11</sup> Leveson was to repeat the process, writing out a ceremonial in 1660 that she had apparently followed when establishing another new Carmelite foundation at Münstereifel in Germany.<sup>12</sup>

Such grand ceremonies surrounding the erection of enclosure were not just a Carmelite passion. The English Poor Clares at Gravelines finally finished their buildings in early July 1612. As with the Carmelites, the abbess instructed the nuns to dress the church the night before their official enclosure. Once finished, they bid this public area farewell, 'offering themselves to embrace their new enclosure.' Sleeping that night in their new cells, the nuns never again 'went into the Church or first gate which they us'd to doe as occasion requir'd.'<sup>13</sup> When the Benedictine community was founded at Boulogne in 1652, before its move to Pontoise six

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Hallett, *Lives of Spirit*, pp. 73–7.

<sup>12</sup> Katrien Daemen-de Gelder, 'Life Writing II', *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800*, gen. ed. Caroline Bowden, vol. 4 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013), pp. 119–20.

<sup>13</sup> Monastery of the Poor Clares, Much Birch, Herefordshire, Gravelines Chronicle, p. 37.

years later, the ceremonies were again similar, taking on a public aspect that saw large numbers of the local populace pressing round to catch a glimpse of the nuns.<sup>14</sup>

Inevitably, many in Protestant England viewed these enclosed convents with a mixture of horror and grim fascination. In 1687, Thomas Penson wrote of his visit to the English Carmelite convent at Antwerp, opining that their existence was the equivalent of being buried alive.<sup>15</sup> An anonymous visitor to the Brussels Dominicans in September 1695 recorded that he spoke to Mary Howard and was greatly moved by her. He added, ‘I was sorry to see her confined within the compass of an iron gate.’<sup>16</sup> These ideas were fed by – and, indeed, fed into – anti-Catholic rhetoric in England. Thomas Robinson’s scurrilous written account of his time with the Bridgettines at Lisbon abounded with licentious tales of sexual shenanigans behind the convent’s walls.<sup>17</sup> Robinson even claimed to have drawn up a list of enclosure infringements by the community’s confessor, Seth Foster, that he planned to put before Lisbon’s Inquisition. These included accusations that Foster regularly entered the enclosure without permission or supervision, staying there for long periods and even sometimes dining with the nuns. Playing to the prejudices of his likely readership, Robinson claimed that Foster also had a special grate fitted in his cell to hear confessions, though this was removable, allowing the nuns to crawl through and ‘passe to his bed by night’. Bestowing on Foster ingenious building and architectural skills, Robinson claimed the confessor was able to seal the removable confession

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<sup>14</sup> Kelly, ‘Convent Management’, p. 248.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Penson, *Penson’s Short Progress into Holland, Flanders and France, with Remarques*, in Kees van Strien (ed.), *Touring the Low Countries: Accounts of British Travellers, 1660–1720* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998), p. 59.

<sup>16</sup> Anonymous London merchant, ‘An Account of My Two Voyages beyond Sea, in the Years 1695 and 1699’, in van Strien, *Touring the Low Countries*, p. 119. There were several Mistress Howards at the convent when it was visited by the anonymous merchant. He records that the nun said she had been there for twenty years, hence my reasoning for identifying her as the Mary Howard whose name in religion was Maria Delphina: ‘Who Were the Nuns?’ database BD041.

<sup>17</sup> Carmen M. Mangion, ‘The Convents and the Outside World’, *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800*, gen. ed. Caroline Bowden, vol. 6 (Pickering & Chatto: London, 2013), pp. 15–16. In Robinson’s polemic, lascivious Jesuits were commonly portrayed as the perverters of the sexually chaste, a common accusation against the Society’s members in their dealings with religious and secular women: see, for example, Arthur F. Marotti, ‘Alienating Catholics in Early Modern England: Recusant Women, Jesuits, and Ideological Fantasies’, in Arthur F. Marotti, *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in Early Modern English Texts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), pp. 1–34.

grille in order to pass all inspections of the cloister performed by the ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>18</sup> The Protestant fantasy of sexual depravity behind convent walls continued into the eighteenth century, English writers taking advantage of anti-clerical tracts from Catholic Europe to depict the convents as bastions of vice rather than virtue.<sup>19</sup> Such pre-conceived assumptions even permeated works more ambivalent towards convent life and enclosure. For example, the central, sentimental heroine of Catharine Seldon's, *The English Nun. A Novel*, published in London in 1797, writes that when she becomes a nun, 'the grate will close on me that will shut me from liberty, my friends, and country', the liberty and friends being bound-up with the 'right-thinking' Protestant English nation.<sup>20</sup>

Although professing a different creed than most of their countrymen and -women, it was in this national environment of suspicion towards conventual life that the overwhelming majority of English women religious were raised. Did they share some of the prejudices of their fellow Englishmen and -women, looking askance at the convent walls and embracing enclosure half-heartedly? Certainly some sense of unease was imbibed, one would-be member of the Antwerp Carmelites approaching her vocation with a sense of trepidation and 'strange notions of religious life believing that when she enter'd the Monastery she should never see the sun and such like.'<sup>21</sup> Indeed, even in Catholic countries, Trent's rules of enclosure were not greeted by women religious with universal welcome, such as at Münster, Florence or Remiremont in France, where the sisters resisted its implementation.<sup>22</sup> Or alternatively, were English women

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<sup>18</sup> Mangion, 'Convents and the Outside World', p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> Emma Major, 'Popular European Satire in English', in Mangion, 'Convents and the Outside World', p. 51; see also the prints on pp. 49–50. For an example of convents being depicted as nests of depravity, see Anon., *The Amorous Friars: Or, The Intrigues of a Convent* (London, 1759), pp. 1–68.

<sup>20</sup> Mangion, 'Convents and the Outside World', p. 113.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Nicky Hallett, *The Senses in Religious Communities, 1600–1800: Early Modern 'Convents of Pleasure'*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> Simone Laqua-O'Donnell, *Women and the Counter-Reformation in Early Modern Münster* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 23–33; Silvia Evangelisti, "'We do not have it, and we do not want it': Women, Power, and Convent Reform in Florence", *The Sixteenth-Century Journal*, 34 (2003), pp. 677–700; Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns Through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, MASS: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 530–1; see also Elissa B. Weaver, 'The Convent Wall in Tuscan Drama', in Craig A. Monson (ed.), *The Crannied Wall: Women, Religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp. 73–86; Mary Laven, 'Cast Out and Shut In: the experience of nuns in Counter-Reformation Venice', in Stephen J. Milner (ed.), *At the Margins: Minority Groups in Premodern Italy* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp. 93–100. It should be noted that, in these

religious fully committed to the Tridentine reforms, their religion trumping the prevailing national attitudes of their early surroundings? Again, there were precedents: no less than Teresa of Avila, the symbol of Catholic Reformation integrity, had insisted on enclosure in Carmelite convents, with the number of visitors severely limited. This was not done because of repression, threats or patriarchal pressure. Rather, as Jodi Bilinkoff has argued, Teresa judged that enclosure had a potentially liberating effect, allowing the nuns to lose any sense of entanglement with the world and so concentrate fully on their vocation.<sup>23</sup>

## II

Despite Church rules, enclosure at the English convents could be somewhat porous on a number of levels. Although it meant the breaching of enclosure, the rules promulgated by the Church did allow rare exceptions, including the entry of bishops in order to carry out visitations. Examples from the English convents include the local ordinary visiting the Pontoise Benedictines in 1675 to give the community his blessing, or the detailed inspections carried out by the diocesan bishop at the Bruges Augustinians.<sup>24</sup> The presence of lay women and girls who lodged at the convents – commonly termed boarders even when they were attendees of the convent schools – although financially advantageous, was itself a breach of the rules surrounding enclosure. The practice was commonplace amongst early modern convents and not just to be found at the English houses.<sup>25</sup> With the growing demand for female education,

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cases and other similar ones, the convents were resisting the implication of the Tridentine enclosure decrees upon their already existing life, whilst the English convents were founded in the wake of these decrees.

<sup>23</sup> Bilinkoff suggests that Teresa therefore reached the same conclusion – that women religious should be enclosed – as the Council of Trent, but possibly for different reasons: Jodi Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa: Religious Reform in a Sixteenth-Century City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 132.

<sup>24</sup> M J Rumsey (ed.), ‘Abbess Neville’s annals of five communities of English Benedictine nuns in Flanders 1598–1687’, *Miscellanea V*, Catholic Record Society, vol. 6 (London, 1909), p. 66; English Convent, Bruges, MS CA, ‘Annals, Vol. 1: 1629–1729’, p. 221; English Convent, Bruges, MS CX, ‘Annals, Vol. 2: 1729–93’, p. 252. At his first visitation, the bishop requested to see a catalogue of the community’s library; though no books were subsequently forbidden, this request shows how texts could also be viewed as threats to the security of enclosure.

<sup>25</sup> Weddle, “‘Women in wolves’ mouths”, p. 122. For more on boarders at the English convents, see Claire Walker, ‘Combining Mary and Martha: gender and work in seventeenth-century English cloisters’, *Sixteenth-Century Journal*, 30 (1999), pp. 408–11; Caroline Bowden, ‘The English Convents in Exile and their Neighbours: Extended Networks, Patrons And Benefactors’, in Helen Hackett (ed.), *Early Modern Exchanges: Dialogues between Nations and Cultures, 1550–1750* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 232–5.



exacerbated by the pressing need of English Catholic families for this provision, the English convents behaved similarly to their European counterparts, acquiescing in this breach of enclosure.<sup>26</sup> As Gilchrist has noted in relation to convent confessors and chaplains in the pre-Reformation period,<sup>27</sup> these individuals did not necessarily penetrate ‘deep’ enclosure. Equally, their schooling fitted round the convent’s liturgical life rather than displacing it. Still, strictly speaking, their presence violated the rules promulgated by the Council of Trent. Although never numerically large – English convent schools tended to cater for around a dozen to thirty girls, and the length of school career varied significantly – their effect was significant. For the convents, as mentioned, there was the potential financial gain. A number of students also entered religious life when of age, though not necessarily in the convent at which they had been educated, let alone the same order. Nevertheless, convent schools did help with recruitment and the strictly contemplative orders saw teaching more in this light. However, the schools’ importance was more far-reaching than that. One of convent education’s key aims was the formation of a confessional identity and, as such, was of paramount importance to the survival of proscribed English Catholicism. Many of the girls were destined for marriage rather than religious life; their convent education thus equipped them with the spiritual and gentlewomanly credentials necessary for a good match, one that would perpetuate the faith for future generations, producing the next wave of English Catholic wives and mothers. Caroline Bowden has judged that the schools run by canonesses, like the Liège Sepulchrines, were more likely to prepare students for this secular life, their liturgical routines allowing for extra educational focus compared to strictly monastic orders. In this way, the convent schools were an important part of the missionary enterprise to ensure the survival of English Catholicism.<sup>28</sup> Such wide-ranging impacts were deemed to justify the blurring of enclosure boundaries.

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<sup>26</sup> For the convent schools, see Caroline Bowden, ‘Community space and cultural transmission: formation and schooling in English enclosed convents in the seventeenth century’, *History of Education*, 34 (2005), pp. 365–86. Examples of girls arriving at the convent to attend the Paris Augustinian school can be found at Westminster Diocesan Archives, Paris Diurnal, 9 August 1697, 14 July 1698, 3 July 1700.

<sup>27</sup> Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 159–60, 190.

<sup>28</sup> See Caroline Bowden, ‘Convent Schooling for English Girls in the “Exile” Period 1600–1800’, *Studies in Church History*, forthcoming; Caroline Bowden, ‘“For the Glory of God”: A Study of the Education of Catholic Women in Convents in Flanders and France in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century’, *Paedagogica Historica*, 35, Supplementary Series V (1999), pp. 77–95; Claire Walker, ‘Exiled Children: Care in English Convents in the 17th and 18th Centuries’, *Children Australia* 41 (2016), pp. 168–77. For an example of one family’s attitude towards female convent education, see Geoffrey Scott, ‘The Throckmortons at Home and Abroad, 1680–1800’,

Examples of boarders can be found from the English Augustinian houses. In 1655, Lady Mary Weston's house was finished at the Louvain Augustinians and she entered 'to live in the inclosure'. The convent chronicler noted that, as a boarder, she generally did not eat in the refectory with the community, except on feast days, though during recreation periods, some of the canonesses did take the opportunity to visit this laywoman in their midst.<sup>29</sup> The Bruges Augustinians regularly accommodated boarders within enclosure. Lucy Herbert, prioress from 1709 to 1744, made a habit of lodging members of her family, such as her then recently-widowed sister, Lady Carrington, as well as her niece Lady Mary Caryll with her three little daughters. Herbert also hosted her sister, Winefrid, who she nursed back to health. Herbert even billeted Winefrid during her journey to meet her husband William Maxwell, 5th earl of Nithsdale, following his escape from the Tower of London where he had been sentenced to death for his role in the 1715 Jacobite rising.<sup>30</sup>

Though these examples may suggest that the English convents infringed the rules of enclosure with apparent ease and a clear conscience, they did not take the action lightly and adhered to the rules for securing such temporary breaches. For example, when Mannock Strickland wished for his daughter to live within the enclosure of the Louvain Augustinians during her visit to the community, the procuratrix Cecily Tunstall replied in 1738 that the abbess would need to 'procure a Licence from' the local ordinary, 'for without that we can't, but for young Lady's he makes no great difficulty.'<sup>31</sup> In 1725, when the aforementioned Lady Mary Caryll lodged with the Bruges Augustinians along with her three daughters, permission was sought from – and granted by – the bishop, Hendrik Jozef van Susteren, for her young son to enter enclosure in the daytime for the length of the family's stay.<sup>32</sup> During Mary Wigmore's term as prioress at the Antwerp Carmelites in the latter half of the seventeenth century, Maria Gabriëlla de Lalaing, countess of Hoogstraten and lay founder of the English Carmel there, procured permission from the bishop that she could make her frequent ten-day spiritual retreats

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in Peter Marshall and Geoffrey Scott (eds.), *Catholic Gentry in English Society: The Throckmortons of Coughton from Reformation to Emancipation* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 171–211, esp. pp. 184–8.

<sup>29</sup> Douai Abbey, C2, p. 565.

<sup>30</sup> Bruges Annals 1, pp. 177, 178, 212, 297, 412; see WWTN BA101. Examples of boarders lodging with the Paris Augustinians can be found at WDA, Paris Diurnal, 25 March 1695, 18–19 March 1697, 23 July 1697.

<sup>31</sup> Cecily Tunstall to Mannock Strickland, 13 May 1738: Mapledurham, Blount MSS, C 64/161, printed in Kelly, 'Convent Management', p. 201.

<sup>32</sup> Bruges Annals 1, p. 412.

within the convent enclosure. The nuns noted approvingly that she did not distract them from their vocation but instead, through example, brought them to a better observation of the Rule.<sup>33</sup>

The example of the Countess of Hoogstraten overlaps with another closely-related group of enclosure breakers. In order to maintain relations with benefactors, the English communities of women religious were willing to slacken their observation of enclosure on rare occasions, allowing particularly valuable patrons to enter the convent's sacred space as a special privilege. As Elizabeth Lehfeldt has suggested in the Spanish context, this secular permeation of enclosure should not be read as a rejection of Trent's rules; to expect such a rigid separation of the sacred and the secular would be to fundamentally misunderstand the convents.<sup>34</sup> Rather, the reverse can be seen in this 'breach': enclosure was so special and so strictly maintained, that to be allowed within was one of the highest rewards that could be granted to a layperson. As such, before their formal enclosure, both the Louvain Augustinians and the Rouen Poor Clares, on rare occasions, allowed early supporters to dine with them.<sup>35</sup> At the election of a new prioress in November 1641, the Bruges Augustinians sought permission to allow in 'an especial benefactress of our house with two other gentlewomen our particular friends' and, shortly after, for a visit from 'a great benefactress to our house'.<sup>36</sup> The Paris Augustinians secured permission from the archbishop to allow in several local supporters because they had been 'beneficial' to the convent.<sup>37</sup> At the Rouen Poor Clares, a major benefactor, Mr Le President D'Acquignie, was allowed to construct a burial vault for his family and the community's deceased under the house's cloister in 1753. He built two flights of stairs into the vault, meaning that the nuns would not have to leave enclosure to enter the vault, while he and his family did not have to enter the convent in order to access it. He gave the keys to both doors

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<sup>33</sup> Daemen-de Gelder, 'Life Writing II', p. 213. The countess had previously secured permission from the bishop for her daughter, Mary Margaret von Salm-Neuweiler (WWTN, HC053), a member of the Hoogstraten Carmelites, to spend a year in the enclosure of the Antwerp house in order to escape hostilities around Hoogstraten.

<sup>34</sup> Lehfeldt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain*, p. 5. See also chapter V on material culture.

<sup>35</sup> Douai Abbey, C2, p. 75; Bowden, 'History Writing', p. 48.

<sup>36</sup> Bruges Annals 1, p. 32. See also Bruges Annals 2, p. 10. Likewise, the Pontoise Benedictines sought the necessary permissions to allow benefactors to enter beyond the convent walls: CRS, vol. 6, p. 66.

<sup>37</sup> WDA, Paris Diurnal, 31 January 1695. The community also allowed the Jacobite associated Catherine, Countess of Middleton, to enter the convent with her daughter and servant, they having secured the necessary permission from the archbishop to do so: WDA, Paris Diurnal, 6 June 1700.

to the community, thus ensuring that, despite his permitted entry into enclosure, observance of the rule was nevertheless maintained.<sup>38</sup>

Such privileged visits could also be used to secure the favour or support of particularly important and powerful people. Much was done to accommodate royal visitors. In 1756 the Bruges Augustinians were surprised by the presence in their church of the governor of the Austrian Netherlands, Prince Charles Alexander, and his sister, Princess Anne Charlotte, the abbess of Remiremont, siblings of the Holy Roman Emperor Francis I. At short notice, the prioress received word from the bishop, Jan-Robert Caimo, that Princess Anne Charlotte wished to see the community's enclosure; this she duly did and stayed for approximately half an hour, seemingly pleased at what she saw.<sup>39</sup> In the previous century, the Antwerp Carmelites had acted in a more overtly political manner: Princess Louise Haollandine, daughter of the elector palatine Frederick V and his wife Elizabeth Stuart, stayed with the community following her conversion to Catholicism and before her installation as abbess of the Cistercian convent at Maubuisson by King Louis XIV.<sup>40</sup> Visits by the English monarchy – or at least what the women religious viewed as the true version of it – were especially feted, with the social currency these generated of great importance to the convents' survival. In 1658, the aforementioned Louise Hollandine was visited by her cousins, Charles II and the Duke of York (the future James II). In a not overly edifying example of Stuart piety, the Duke of York, spotting Sister Tecla of St Paul (Catherine Clifton), a person 'so lovely and beautiful', told his brother 'if he had amind to see a pritty women he must goe to the Infirmary, which he did where dear Sister Tecla was'.<sup>41</sup> In the summer of 1666, the Queen Mother, Henrietta Maria, visited the Pontoise Benedictines and remained in the enclosure with 'all her court' for a couple of hours.<sup>42</sup> Following the ousting of James II at the Glorious Revolution, the Paris Augustinians received regular visits from the exiled monarch and his queen, Mary of Modena.<sup>43</sup> On 8 August 1708, the Bruges Augustinians received in enclosure with all his attendants, 'our King James

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<sup>38</sup> Bowden, 'History Writing', pp. 266–7. See also chapter III on material culture.

<sup>39</sup> Bruges Annals 2, p. 126.

<sup>40</sup> Daemen-de Gelder, 'Life Writing II', p. xv.

<sup>41</sup> Daemen-de Gelder, 'Life Writing II', p. xv, 188.

<sup>42</sup> CRS, vol. 6, p. 59.

<sup>43</sup> WDA, Paris Diurnal, 1 April 1695, 21 November 1695, 9 September 1696, 9 September 1697, 11 September 1698, 29 October 1698, 16 August 1699, 21 May 1700.

the third' who the canonesses considered to have acted admirably despite his young age.<sup>44</sup> It should be added that the Stuarts recognized the gravity of entering the convent's sacred space, on two occasions declining to enter the Bruges Augustinians' enclosure for fear of causing regular infringement of their rules. This was particularly evident in 1746, when the convent was visited by the then Duke of York and future cardinal, Henry Benedict, who displayed his scrupulous religiosity by choosing not to disturb the canonesses in their prayers before the exposed Blessed Sacrament.<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the rules of enclosure appearing to encourage an inward-focus amongst convent inhabitants, women religious still saw themselves as part of the wider community. What they learnt from their supposedly spiritually stimulating environment could be passed outside of the convent walls. For example, the chronicler at the Rouen Poor Clares recorded that Magdaline Browne was much missed by the surrounding populace after her death in 1659, praising how 'she gave much satisfaction to the seculars, when she was at the speakhouse, & did extreemly edify them'.<sup>46</sup> In 1744, Lucy Herbert, prioress at the Bruges Augustinians, wrote to her community, urging them to appreciate that entering enclosure did not mean turning their backs on the world:

Charity to our neighbours not only within the enclosure but all so the poor with out, for that which by your care you prevented should be spent & weasted, would be come theres by enableing the community to do more Charity, if therefore out the motive of pleasing God & inabling the Community to do greater Charitys you are carefull of all you will increase greatly your own merit.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Bruges Annals 1, p. 253. The convent chronicler noted severely that a crowd of other people, both rich and poor, also managed to gain access with the retinue despite having nothing to do with the royal party. The future James III, during his time as Prince of Wales, also visited the Paris Augustinians on 14 May 1696 and, with his sister Louisa Maria, on 30 September 1697: WDA, Paris Diurnal, 14 May 1696, 30 September 1697.

<sup>45</sup> Bruges Annals 1, p. 73; Bruges Annals 2, pp. 106–7.

<sup>46</sup> Bowden, 'History Writing', p. 75. See Lehfeldt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain*, p. 185. Claire Conyers of the Aire Poor Clare community wrote to family members not with worldly connections in mind but, as Victoria Van Hyning contests, to achieve 'eternal union with friends and family, and the maintenance of their collective faith.' As such, her correspondence did not represent the breach of enclosure that it is usually interpreted as: Victoria Van Hyning (ed.), 'Poor Clares of Aire: Correspondence of the Conyers Family', in Nicky Hallett (ed.), 'Life Writing I', *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800*, gen. ed. Caroline Bowden, vol. 3 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012)

<sup>47</sup> Kelly, 'Convent Management', p. 333.

An example of this understanding of outward charity is provided by Margaret Mostyn's actions during her time as prioress of the Lierre Carmelites in the 1650s. Moved to pity at the torrid situation of a regiment of exiled English royalists in the town, Mostyn commanded the convent's portress not to deny relief to any who requested it. Subsequently, every day for several months, twenty of the most destitute, not all of them Catholic, were fed in the convent speakhouse and 'lower room', with a fire lit so they could warm themselves. The community also provided medical supplies and covered the costs for doctors to aid the desperate lay exiles.<sup>48</sup> In February 1695, the Paris Augustinians were moved to help the son of a joiner who lived in the surrounding area. The boy was starving so they employed him to clean the public church and, when necessary, enter the convent to run errands for the community. In return, he was paid a small wage but, more importantly, received victuals for his work.<sup>49</sup> In June 1635 the Bruges Augustinians hosted refugee nuns from Louvain within their enclosure (and had permission from the bishop to do so) during the siege of Louvain that was part of the Thirty Years' War.<sup>50</sup> They would repeat the act in 1746 following the French siege of the English garrison at Ostend during the War of the Austrian Succession, when they granted assistance to a refugee community of nuns, as well as having leave from the bishop to entertain them on one occasion.<sup>51</sup> Such compassion had seen the Bruges Augustinians break enclosure for good reason on several other occasions. For example, when a workman fell from the convent roof into the convent garden and broke both his legs in 1706, the canonesses allowed his wife into enclosure to comfort him till the surgeon arrived; and in 1745 a local man was allowed to enter enclosure to visit his terminally ill daughter who, at the time, was a schoolgirl at the convent.<sup>52</sup>

Decisions to permit breaches of enclosure like the above were not taken lightly. The importance the English convents attached to the Tridentine decrees is evident in their fear that any infringement of these rules would provoke scandal. When Catherine Burton was prioress of the Antwerp Carmelites from 1700 to 1714, a novice 'broke out from us: I was ready to sink down when I first heard it, fearing it might bring some scandal on ye house' amongst those who were not aware of the novice's developing mental health issues. Thus, Burton mortified

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<sup>48</sup> Hallett, *Lives of Spirit*, p. 186.

<sup>49</sup> WDA, Paris Diurnal, February 1695.

<sup>50</sup> Bruges Annals 1, p. 18.

<sup>51</sup> Bruges Annals 2, p. 103.

<sup>52</sup> Bruges Annals 1, p. 235; Bruges Annals 2, p. 87.

herself in reparation and admonished those who should have taken better care of the unstable nun, though, fortunately for the convent, ‘she was only seen by two or three honest neighbours who soon perceived her condition and pittied her and our condition’ before she was back behind the convent walls.<sup>53</sup> Such horror was echoed by Henrietta Hagan, who viewed atonement as necessary for any assault on the sanctity of enclosure. In a letter from her Benedictine convent in Paris to John Bolton, SJ, in America, Hagan, commenting on the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II’s decree in 1783 to abolish all enclosed monastic communities, wrote that it would be a great blessing if America should be converted and some monasteries established ‘that might make a small atonement to almighty God for the faults of Emperor.’<sup>54</sup> More directly ignominious were events at the end of October 1696 involving the Bruges Augustinians when Dorothy Errington ditched her habit and stole secretly from enclosure with the assistance of a Lieutenant John Grant; the convent chronicler was only slightly less scandalized that he was a member of William of Orange’s army, who she described as the usurper of the English crown. The community scolded themselves for allowing Errington to talk to seculars too often at the grate, seemingly believing that this initial, limited softening of enclosure had laid the foundations of the scandal.<sup>55</sup>

Such anxiety about regularity at the grate shows a perception amongst the English convents that enclosure and their identity as committedly Catholic convents was continually under attack. The grate was a site of porous enclosure, so became the focus of convent unease. Rules were developed and strictly followed concerning conduct at the grate, including that any nun speaking to a secular there had to be accompanied by another.<sup>56</sup> The Louvain Augustinians gave voice to concerns surrounding the grate in their Council Book, stipulating that

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<sup>53</sup> Hallett, *Lives of Spirit*, p. 156. The Louvain Augustinians experienced a similar case in the first half of the seventeenth century, Frances Herbert escaping enclosure through the convent orchard before being discovered at a neighbouring house and subsequently ‘put in prison’ in the convent due to her madness: Douai Abbey, C2, pp. 381–4.

<sup>54</sup> Teresa Hagan to John Bolton, SJ, 18 January 1786: Maryland Provincial Archives, Box 57, folder 11, Georgetown University Library, Special Collections Research Center, Washington DC, printed in Mangion, ‘Convents and the Outside World’, p. 152.

<sup>55</sup> Bruges Annals 1, pp. 183–5, 244–52. Errington subsequently married Grant and was formally excommunicated but, following his death, returned to the convent in 1707 and, deeply penitent, was allowed to re-join the community.

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, CRS vol. 8, p. 313. As Hallett observes, breaches of enclosure – ‘whether literal, or by showing one’s face without a veil or talking unnecessarily to outsiders – were regarded very seriously, with severe penalties imposed’: Hallett, *Lives of Spirit*, pp. 15–16. During the first wave of community breakdown at the

statutes concerning the grate shall be punctually observed nor shall the Prioress have authoritie to give leave to any to speake aloane with either father or mother brother or sister or with Priest or Religious excepte the Extraordinary Confessour whoe is licensed to heare confessions at the cloyster 2 or 3 tymes a yeare according to the Holy Councell of Trent.<sup>57</sup>

Nicky Hallett suggests the nuns' enclosure was under continual assault, arguing that outside sounds and smells wafted over the convent walls to permeate the cloister, thus notionally breaching the spirit of enclosure.<sup>58</sup> It is little surprise, therefore, that any evident transgression of enclosure was viewed severely. Equally, any false accusation that enclosure rules were being slackly observed, as suffered by the Paris Conceptionists, were treated with especial horror.<sup>59</sup> These sentiments combined to create an apparently active fear amongst the English convents of enclosure being broken. For example, in May 1677, when the Rouen Poor Clares' church was consecrated by Andrew Lynch, the Irish bishop of Kilfenora, the chronicler wrote of the community's delight that the ceremony was private, plus started at three o'clock in the morning and finished by midday, meaning 'no secular person came into the inclosure, which was a great blessing of God, & a favour of my Lord Bishop, for had not his Lordship begun the ceremony so early, it wou'd have been impossible to have kept out the seculars'.<sup>60</sup> This was not a new

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Brussels Benedictines, alleged frequency at the grille was a source of acrimony: Jaime Goodrich, 'Authority, Gender, and Monastic Piety: controversies at the English Benedictine convent in Brussels, 1620–1623', *British Catholic History*, 33 (2016), pp. 108–9.

<sup>57</sup> Kelly, 'Convent Management', p. 376. In their preoccupation with regulating behaviour at the grille, the English convents were behaving no differently to their early modern continental counterparts: see for example, Barbara R. Woshinsky, *Imagining Women's Conventual Spaces in France, 1600–1800: The Cloister Disclosed* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 117–57.

<sup>58</sup> Hallett, *The Senses in Religious Communities*, pp. 147–8, 172. The Louvain Augustinians evidently shared similar concerns about enclosure breaches away from the grate, it being written in the Council Book that 'None of the Religious may speake to the neighbours or other worldly persons att the hedges of the garden or orchard unless itt be of necessitie required and that in presence of the Prioress or Procuratrix under paine of publicke penance': Kelly, 'Convent Management', p. 377. None of this seemed to stop the Paris Augustinians watching from a convent window the city's firework display marking the birth of Louis-Charles, son of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, in 1785: Hallett, 'Life Writing I', p. 306.

<sup>59</sup> Kelly, 'Convent Management', p. 441. The accusation was made by a lay sister, Elizabeth Agnes Latham, who was militating for one particular side during disagreements at the convent about spiritual direction.

<sup>60</sup> Bowden, 'History Writing', pp. 84–5.



worry amongst the community: during the convent's final stages of construction, before enclosure was formally established, the nuns had dined in the kitchen and said the Office in the refectory, but 'seculars' would wander in meaning 'they were much importun'd, & troubled by the secular who came in almost perpetually.'<sup>61</sup> The Gravelines Poor Clares were beset by similar disquiet when an old wall was being replaced around 1612–1613, which meant that the house was accessible to the outside world for three months. The convent chronicler recorded the fretting that took hold of the community at the time: the sisters' suspicious minds ran wild; barking dogs were understood as a sign that thieves were about the house; reports circulated of men roaming within the convent confines during the hours of darkness. The community's equilibrium was only restored when the governor agreed to station soldiers to guard the hole in the convent's wall.<sup>62</sup>

Despite these fears being expressed by several communities, lay intrusion was not always for nefarious reasons. The Lisbon Bridgettines were asleep in their beds when a fire broke out in the convent in August 1651; if it had not been for members of the local population clambering over the convent wall to warn them then fatalities would have been inevitable. Still, the evacuation caused upset amongst several of the community who proved reluctant to leave their compound and break the walls even in such a dire situation.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, the Gravelines Poor Clare convent had been engulfed by fire in 1626. The convent gates were opened, allowing the governor, magistrates and townspeople to come to the sisters' aid, preventing the

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<sup>61</sup> Bowden, 'History Writing', p. 48. In 1655, a flood severely damaged the Louvain Augustinian convent, allowing people to enter enclosure as they said it was no longer erected: Douai Abbey, C2, pp. 604–5. Similarly, in 1710 during the expansion of the convent grounds, people regularly entered the Bruges Augustinians enclosure to view the monastery: Bruges Annals 1, p. 275. Apparently, the public were keen to avail themselves of any opportunity to glimpse behind the convent walls; just before the convent's jubilee in 1729, a rumour spread round Bruges that anyone would be allowed to visit the enclosure, though the bishop assured all that this was not the case: Bruges Annals 1, p. 451. Similarly, in 1736, when the new church was being built, a mob of people had to be held back from entering enclosure due to its being broken, the bishop publicly telling the crowd that they were not to breach the convent's notional walls, he leading by example by approaching the grate rather than entering the house: Bruges Annals 2, p. 34.

<sup>62</sup> Gravelines Chronicle, pp. 43–4. Building work was a regular cause of broken enclosure; the Bruges Augustinian chronicler wrote with evident relief when work was completed and enclosure could again be observed, or, more blessedly, if it did not have to be infringed in the first place: Bruges Annals 1, pp. 48–50, 60–1, 95, 287, 347; Bruges Annals 2, p. 30.

<sup>63</sup> Exeter University Library, MS 262/Add. 1/B/158, pp. 34–7. Due to the nuns' panic, several of the community emerged without any footwear, prompting a number of laypeople to ask if they were discalced.

fire from spreading even further. The community had to be ordered 'to come forth & leave their Inclosure' because, despite the danger, none had done so. Two sisters still refused to countenance leaving 'their deare Inclosure', but the confessor returned and forced their removal.<sup>64</sup>

### III

The nuns' evident reluctance to leave the enclosure to which they had vowed their lives is indicative of a more significant aspect of the relationship between English women religious and their sacred space: it underlines the importance they laid upon following the Tridentine regulations. Even when forced to leave their convent in the face of potential violence during the French revolutionary wars, some of the Brussels Dominicans had to be dragged out by force, 'so unwilling were they to pass the enclosure gate of their holy sanctuary.'<sup>65</sup> Thus, far from the anti-popish horror stories of forced 'walling-up' and in opposition to the historiographical view of enclosure as oppressive imposition,<sup>66</sup> English women religious seemed to yearn for this sacred space. They vocally rejected the accusation that their lives were akin to being buried alive.<sup>67</sup> Unlike the previously mentioned nuns of Münster, Florence and Remiremont, who apparently had claustration forced upon them – and it is debatable whether they were typical of the reaction of women religious across the continent<sup>68</sup> – the English

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<sup>64</sup> Gravelines Chronicle, pp. 150–3.

<sup>65</sup> The Prioress and community of Carisbrooke, Isle of Wight (eds.), 'Records of the nuns of the second order', *Dominicana*, CRS, vol. 25 (London, 1925), p. 240. Similarly, the threat of violence during the War of the Spanish Succession meant the Hoogstraten Carmelites were forced to seek refuge in Mechelen from 1701 to 1712: WWTN HC053.

<sup>66</sup> For example, Gabriella Zarri, 'Gender, Religious Institutions and Social Discipline: the reform of the regulars', in Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis (eds.), *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy* (London: Longman, 1998), pp. 210–12; Francesca Medioli, 'An Unequal Law: the enforcement of *clausura* before and after the Council of Trent', in Christine Meek (ed.), *Women in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), pp. 136–52, esp. p. 152. Barbara K. Diefendorf has noted this historiographical trend, shaped as it is by concentration solely on active orders and the Church's reaction to an apostolic role for female religious: Barbara K. Diefendorf, 'Contradictions of the Century of Saints: Aristocratic Patronage and the Convents of Counter-Reformation Paris', *French Historical Studies*, 24.3 (2001), p. 471 n. 5.

<sup>67</sup> Penson, *Penson's Short Progress into Holland*, in van Strien, *Touring the Low Countries*, p. 58.

<sup>68</sup> Teresa of Avila wrote that 'A convent of unenclosed nuns seems to me a place of very great danger' so she sought in her reforms 'to withdraw more from everything and live my professions and vocation with greater

convents embraced enclosure as a positive choice. Members of the Antwerp Carmelites went so far as to describe enclosure as a ‘paradise upon Earth’.<sup>69</sup> Justina Corham was willing to risk her life in the 1630s by ignoring doctors’ advice that she was not strong enough to live within the rigorously observed enclosure of the Ghent Benedictines.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, in 1712, commenting on his visit to the Antwerp Carmelite house, the English traveller John Leake remarked that all the sisters ‘seemed well enough pleased with their retired condition.’<sup>71</sup> The nuns’ enthusiasm for enclosure is not merely indicative of English acceptance of European Catholic norms but shows English commitment and dedication to the Tridentine conventual movement.

For English women religious, embracing enclosure was a moment of profound joy. When, in 1638, the widowed Margaret Coningsby entered the Ghent Benedictines, it was remarked that her ‘excessive Joy’ was ‘almost incredible,’ she ‘seeming all transported, and as one that did rather fly to the quire to give God thanks, then go on her feet.’<sup>72</sup> The Rouen Poor Clares so desired to be enclosed that they begged the Archbishop of Rouen to perform the formal rite, brushing aside his warning that they would no longer be able to beg for alms. Instead, ‘the great & ardent desire they had to live retyredly ... made them rather choose to hazard their temporal subsistence, then frustrate their souls of their spiritual nourishment.’ The formal establishment of enclosure ‘was an unspeakable comfort to the poor Sisters’.<sup>73</sup>

Furthermore, strict enclosure became, in the eyes of some English women religious, a form of freedom. For Margaret Clement, entering religion at the Louvain Augustinians was ‘a kind of liberty’ compared to her home life.<sup>74</sup> During the eighteenth century, at the Antwerp Carmelite convent, Margaret Smythe, ‘often, in a transport of joy, kist the convent gate, as the happie [cause] of shutting out the world from her, & inclosing her in this holy house’.<sup>75</sup> Following a visit to her sister at the Antwerp Carmelites in the second half of the seventeenth

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perfection and enclosure’: quoted in Hallett, *Lives of Spirit*, p. 242. See also the example of Angélique Arnauld at Port-Royal: Laqua-O’Donnell, *Women and the Counter-Reformation*, p. 23.

<sup>69</sup> Hallett, *Lives of Spirit*, p. 117.

<sup>70</sup> Lady Abbess and Community, ‘Obituary notices of the nuns of the English Benedictine Abbey of Ghent in Flanders 1627–1811’, *Miscellanea XI*, CRS, vol. 19 (London: 1917), p. 24.

<sup>71</sup> John Leake, ‘A Diary of Occurences and Observations Begun June the 15th O.S. 1711’, in van Strien, *Touring the Low Countries*, p. 68.

<sup>72</sup> CRS, vol. 19, p. 65.

<sup>73</sup> Bowden, ‘History Writing’, pp. 28, 48–9.

<sup>74</sup> This was according to her contemporary convent biographer, Elizabeth Shirley: Lux-Sterritt, ‘Spirituality’, p. 10.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Hallett, *Lives of Spirit*, p. 127.

century, Lucy Carew fell ill and began to reflect on the ‘uncertaintys and decepts of all things in this world, so that she grew quite disgusted with itt’. She thus made up her mind to become a religious, recovering in enclosure and begging to be received as a quire nun rather than be forced to leave again.<sup>76</sup> Following the community’s formal enclosure, the Rouen Poor Clare chronicler noted that ‘they were indeed imprison’d both in their blessed enclosure, from the noise of the world, & its deceitfull pleasures, & in their bodys from the presence of their heavenly Spouse,’ all of which ‘happynes & quiet repose’ was ‘enjoy’d’ by the sisters.<sup>77</sup> Agnes Rosendell, a native of Antwerp, was so desperate to enter the English Carmelite house in the city that she defied her family’s wishes and broke in through the turn in 1631. Apart from Rosendell’s actions underlining how stringent the convent’s adherence to enclosure must have been if she had to resort to this, she then used the rule of enclosure to prevent her family from removing her from the Carmel, the protection of the walls offering her safety and even emancipation.<sup>78</sup>

In light of this positive embracing of claustration and the nuns’ reluctance to break it even in the direst need, it is unsurprising to find the English convents placing great value on the observance of enclosure. The Rule copied for use at both the Antwerp and Lierre Carmelite convents put, in the view of Nicky Hallett, ‘considerable emphasis ... on the importance of enclosure, with various rules designed to secure it – in both spatial and conceptual terms.’ These endeavours included, for example, the previously mentioned advice on keys and stipulated that, if the rules were broken, a nun should be ‘severely reprimanded, given a series of warnings and even imprisoned’ within the convent, all of which suggests just how importantly maintenance of enclosure was viewed.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, even before it was architecturally possible to erect enclosure formally, there are examples of the English convents striving to adhere as fully as possible to the Church’s decrees on the matter. After the fledgling Poor Clare community arrived in Gravelines, they were greeted by members of the clergy and English laypeople resident in the town. Lacking the material means to properly keep enclosure, they entertained the guests, ‘with their veiles down & never less then three together, the companions standing by if it were for any little space, otherwise they were kneeling, keeping their devotions

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<sup>76</sup> Daemen-de Gelder, ‘Life Writing II’, p. 240.

<sup>77</sup> Bowden, ‘History Writing’, p. 49.

<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Hallett, *Lives of Spirit*, pp. 79–81.

<sup>79</sup> Hallett, *Lives of Spirit*, p. 241.

& the like, but never spake without express leave, & then very briefly & with low voice.’<sup>80</sup> When the Bruges Augustinians were forced to rebuild their garden wall in 1768, they constructed a wooden fence inside the perimeter before pulling down the actual enclosure wall, taking great joy that any ‘irregularities’ from the entrance of lay people were thus avoided.<sup>81</sup> During Margaret Clement’s time as prioress of St Ursula’s Augustinian convent, before the foundation of the English house of St Monica’s at Louvain in 1609, the enclosure walls had been levelled by flood waters, meaning people could enter the convent grounds; the Louvain Augustinian chronicler recorded the calm authority Clement exuded in maintaining enclosure, despite it not being possible to carry out repairs immediately.<sup>82</sup> Any potential leakage into or from the avowed sacred space of the communities had to be stemmed: at the council meeting of the Paris Augustinians in September 1715, the sisters decided to stop the practice of the pensioners eating with the community, as it required the cooks and kitchen maids to venture outside to buy provisions so often ‘that it would be an intyre violation of the sacred inclsoure, as tyme shewed it did.’<sup>83</sup>

Successfully maintaining the strict division between cloister and outside world in the face of all challenges became something of a badge of honour. For example, when Sub-Prioress Mary Heton celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of her profession at the Bruges Augustinians in 1707, there were grand celebrations, including eight days of recreation, as well as plays performed by the community. However, despite pressure from the community’s friends, the prioress, Frances Wright, refused to allow anyone to enter enclosure; instead, seculars were entertained at the confessor’s house and at the grate.<sup>84</sup> By 1710 Elizabeth Weston of the same convent had been suffering great pain from a form of rheumatism for five years. The doctors were unable to ease the condition so it was thought that she should try visiting some special waters. Weston refused, saying she would rather suffer any pain than leave enclosure for the sake of a cure.<sup>85</sup> In the previous century, around 1613, the Gravelines Poor Clares were beset

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<sup>80</sup> Gravelines Chronicle, p. 14.

<sup>81</sup> Bruges Annals 2, p. 196.

<sup>82</sup> Douai Abbey, C2, p. 17.

<sup>83</sup> WDA, ‘Acts of the Council of the Canonesses Regulars of St Augustin’s Order Established upon the ancient fossé of St Victor in Paris’, p. 37.

<sup>84</sup> Bruges Annals 1, p. 242.

<sup>85</sup> Bruges Annals 1, p. 279. She finally agreed to try the course prescribed when Louis de Sabran, vice-provincial of the Jesuits, told her that he agreed nobody should leave their monastery just to save their life, but she should think about the burden her not trying all available treatments might cause her to become to the community. The

by an epidemic. Everybody, including the clergy attached to the convent, advised the community to accept the entry of lay sisters to tend the sick but the nuns were 'so strict in their enclosure' that Abbess Mary Gough, 'wou'd not permit it'.<sup>86</sup> With this prizing of adherence to the stipulations surrounding enclosure, it is little wonder that Mary Howard, before her profession at the Rouen Poor Clares in 1675, was mortified when her commitment to enclosure was questioned.<sup>87</sup>

Even in death there was an anxiety to keep enclosure. When Anne Tremaine died in Bruges in September 1637, the Augustinians managed to have her buried in the convent's grounds, relieved that no more of the community had to be buried outside the walls.<sup>88</sup> Beset by the plague, the Rouen Poor Clares were granted some comfort following the death of one of their members, Anne Wood, on 29 October 1668, when they were told that she could be buried in the garden, 'it being not fitting that a Religious woman & Child of Saint Clare who had kept enclosure all her life, shou'd break it at her death, by being buried in a parish Church amongst all the rest of the infected'.<sup>89</sup> Elizabeth Worsley was well known in Antwerp, a host of local intellectuals regularly visiting the English Carmel to confer with her through the grate. So many people wished to pay their respects following Worsley's death in 1642 that her body had to be placed near the grate, thus ensuring the convent's sacred space was not violated.<sup>90</sup>

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prizing of theological opinion over medical was apparently not unusual in the English convents. In his visitation report to the Cambrai Benedictines in December 1751, Cuthbert Farnworth, OSB, told the community to 'let the Doctor's orders be obeyed': Nancy, Archives Meurthe-et-Moselle, Séries H 79.

<sup>86</sup> Gravelines Chronicle, p. 61. Gough would succumb to the same illness: Gravelines Chronicle, p. 65.

<sup>87</sup> Bowden, 'History Writing', pp. 246, 289. Tellingly, the French house at Port-Royal that she was planning to join was equally horrified at this, suspecting she must therefore be 'a woman of light behaviour' who could bring scandal to the house.

<sup>88</sup> Bruges Annals 1, p. 22. The community were also happy to extend their perimeters during Mary Bedingfield's time as prioress (1661–93), thus bringing the old school within their boundary: Bruges Annals 1, p. 170.

<sup>89</sup> Bowden, 'History Writing', pp. 216–17. Following the death of Mary Brent at the Antwerp Carmelites in 1784, the community were permitted to bury her in the garden, at the foot of the Calvary, rather than interring her remains outside the walls, a recent Imperial edict having been issued on the use of dead cellars and the internment of remains: Kelly, 'Convent Management', p. 325.

<sup>90</sup> Daemen-de Gelder, 'Life Writing II', pp. xv, 90. People were keen to have their rosary beads, reliquaries or religious medals touch the body, implying that she was viewed as a saint or, at the very least, close to heaven. The convent collections record that these items were handed in at the turn for such purpose or even thrown through the grate, thus raising questions about the nature of enclosure.

Indeed, the English nuns' zeal for enclosure was so great that they quickly became renowned for it. Following her election as prioress of St Ursula's, Louvain, in 1570, the first thing Margaret Clement sought to reform in the convent, 'was to bring in inclosure, which had never benn well kept, before her time.' This she did only seven years after the decree by the Council of Trent, underlining just how seriously this Englishwoman was taking the regulations. Clement is portrayed as heroic for her own strict adherence to the rules of enclosure and for pushing through these reforms with steely determination. She is even praised for her refusal to compromise enclosure by allowing a desperately sick canoness' mother to visit her; this took added nerve as the ill nun was the niece of William Allen, leader of the English Catholic world at the time. When permission was granted by the bishop for Clement's community to leave their convent due to national tensions with the Flemish, she refused. A member of the community wrote back to the bishop complaining about Clement's decision but, reportedly, the bishop simply smiled, saying, 'I am sorry I have so few such superours I would to god I had more of them.'<sup>91</sup> The commitment to enclosure displayed by English women religious could also be spread as a form of missionary activity within the wider Catholic Reformation. In the early 1640s, the abbess of the Cambrai Benedictines, Catherine Gascoigne, was asked by the Archbishop of Cambrai, Henri-François van der Burch, to reform 'the Religious Dames of S Lazars' in Cambrai; her reputation for discipline having gone before her, this she did 'to the spirituall profet of those Religious, reducing them to the happy estate of inclosure with the stricte observance of our holy Rule & al Regular discipline'.<sup>92</sup>

The Antwerp Carmelites also received praise from the local ordinary for their commitment to enclosure. Walking with some of the community in the convent garden, Marius Ambrosius Capello, OP, bishop of Antwerp from 1654 to 1676, spotted a low perimeter wall and

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<sup>91</sup> Hallett, 'Life Writing I', pp. 16, 375 n. 34. The Louvain chronicler records what measures Clement took following her horrified reaction to the community's lax observance of the rules, which saw them inviting people in for banquets and the like. She installed large iron gates and reduced the speakhouse to just one grate, over which she or a portress selected by her had authority. The chronicler records that some 'who loved liberty' disliked these actions, but many others were glad, 'seeing themselves freed from much distraction' to serve God accordingly: Douai Abbey, C2, p. 14. Clement was 'a very strict observer of regular discipline' thanks to her tutor Elizabeth Woodford, who had been a nun before the dissolution of the religious houses in England and had joined St Ursula's in Louvain as a refugee: Douai Abbey, C2, pp. 2–3, 10–11; WWTN LA308. For the foundation of the English Augustinian convent in Louvain, see Introduction.

<sup>92</sup> Joseph S. Hansom (ed.), 'The English Benedictines of the convent of our Blessed Lady of Good Hope in Paris, now St. Benedict's Priory, Colwich, Staffordshire', *Miscellanea VII*, CRS, vol. 9 (London, 1911), p. 366.

commented, favourably, ‘Dear Children Love only incloses you for had I had such walls in Italy, I should not have kept one Nun in the Monastery.’<sup>93</sup> The community scribe recorded that the bishop was not the only person to be impressed by this devotion to the rules: others who entered the enclosure were struck by the holiness of the place, voicing such expressions as, ‘God truly lives here, and we sensibly find that we tread on holy Ground’. When the general of the Carmelites visited Antwerp and had permission from the bishop to look round the convent, he ‘could not contain himself from crying out in admiration, [‘]O Glory of Carmell, here truly lives the primitive Spirit of St Teresa[‘],’ before ‘shewing himself highly pleased and edified at his departure’. Many other visiting Carmelite friars were similarly awed at the community’s commitment to Teresa of Avila’s recommended reforms, comparing them favourably to other Carmelite convents they had encountered.<sup>94</sup>

Apart from showing signs of embracing enclosure more fervently than their continental counterparts, this devotion also seems to have outstripped their male equivalents. For example, while English Benedictine nuns eagerly adopted full enclosure,<sup>95</sup> English Benedictine monks were not fully enclosed, a fact that caused some comment in European Catholic circles. Moreover, following a visitation to the English monastery of St Laurence’s in Dieulouard, France, performed by representatives of the English Benedictine Congregation in 1624, the prior was ordered, within fifteen days, ‘To avoid suspition that might be conceived of back doores’ he must ‘see that the doare out of our house into the cowhouse and the back doare or doares out of the lodgings [...] be mured up, and the[n] all understand the places w[i]thout those doares not to bee w[i]thin the Clausures.’<sup>96</sup> Therefore, where male Benedictines made the most of their missionary efforts to attract secular and ecclesiastical approval,<sup>97</sup> the females of the Order instead wore their commitment to enclosure as a badge of honour.

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<sup>93</sup> Daemen-de Gelder, ‘Life Writing II’, p. 64.

<sup>94</sup> Daemen-de Gelder, ‘Life Writing II’, p. 67.

<sup>95</sup> For the example of Gerturde More at the Cambrai Benedictines, see Laurence Lux-Sterritt, *English Benedictine Nuns in Exile in the Seventeenth Century: Living Spirituality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), pp. 30–1.

<sup>96</sup> Ampleforth Abbey, DX37-6, p. 3.

<sup>97</sup> For the monks’ appeal to lay and ecclesiastical groups, plus justifications of their only partial observance of enclosure, see James E. Kelly, ‘The Contested Appropriation of George Gervase’s Martyrdom: European Religious Patronage and the Controversy Over the Oath of Allegiance’, *Journal of British Studies*, 57 (2018), pp. 253–74.



This devotion to and observance of the Tridentine regulations surrounding enclosure was not only evident to the nuns' co-religionists. In 1687, Thomas Penson could only talk to a member of the Antwerp Carmelites through the grille in the convent speakhouse. He noted that she veiled her face and asked for it to be removed. The nun replied, 'Sir, you were pleased to require more than we can admit of, viz. to see us: which by our order we are forbid, for we must not unveil our faces.'<sup>98</sup> Visiting the Bruges Franciscans in autumn 1672, Thomas Scott was entertained by the abbess but 'being not permitted to enter further than the gates, we saw not anything of curiosity.' Likewise, at the Dunkirk Benedictines, he visited the public chapel but was not allowed to see anything else.<sup>99</sup> Admittedly, to the over-active imagination of the British Protestant traveller, the women behind the walls became something akin to forbidden fruit. Richard Holford stopped at the Bruges Augustinian convent in August 1671 and remarked it was home to 'a great many English nuns and some very handsome',<sup>100</sup> which begs the question how he knew this apart from through his own over furtive fantasies. A month later, John Walker recorded that he had seen two 'beautiful' Irish nuns at the Dunkirk Benedictines.<sup>101</sup> In June 1711, the decorative painter Sir James Thornhill attended a service in the church of the Ghent Benedictines; transported by the beauty of the singing, he 'stole privately close to the gate' to catch a glimpse of the beautiful creatures within.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Penson, *Penson's Short Progress into Holland*, in van Strien, *Touring the Low Countries*, pp. 58–9. An anonymous London merchant visited the Brussels Dominicans in September 1695 and conversed with a member of the community 'in the speaking room': Anonymous London merchant, 'An Account of My Two Voyages', in van Strien, *Touring the Low Countries*, p. 119. In contrast, the Paris Augustinians were ticked off by their external superior, Lewis Innes, in February 1694 for not sufficiently lowering their veils to cover their faces when speaking to visitors in the parlour: WDA, A XXXVI, ff. 167–9. My thanks to Stephen Morrison for his assistance with translating the original French. Four years later, the same community was advised by their new external superior, Benet Nelson, OSB, to tone down their hospitality when clergy entered enclosure to perform burials or similar, saying they should not be permitted to eat or drink within the convent's walls: WDA, Paris Diurnal, 28 January 1698.

<sup>99</sup> Thomas Scott, 'Iter Breve, or a short and plain narrative of a journey from London to Antwerpe in Flanders', in van Strien, *Touring the Low Countries*, pp. 102, 139. The abbess at the time was Susan Brinckhurst: WWTN BF032.

<sup>100</sup> Richard Holford, 'Account of a tour in the Low Countries', in van Strien, *Touring the Low Countries*, p. 99.

<sup>101</sup> John Walker, *A Voyage Begunn in August Ann<sup>o</sup> 1671*, in van Strien, *Touring the Low Countries*, p. 137. The nuns in question were most likely Catherina Butler and Mary Legge: WWTN GB034, DB094.

<sup>102</sup> James Thornhill, *Sir James Thornhill's sketch-book travel journal of 1711: a visit to East Anglia and the Low Countries*, in van Strien, *Touring the Low Countries*, p. 163.

Having earned a reputation for embracing strict enclosure, the English convents were able to turn it to their own advantage. On one level, it was a vital marketing tool, both for attracting benefactions and potential recruits. Allowing special benefactors to enter enclosure has already been discussed, but the English convents were also willing to allow those interested in joining a community to experience enclosure – and just how rigorously they followed it – as part of their ‘brand marketing’. In the early 1640s, Anne Somerset, daughter of Henry, 1st marquess of Worcester, had decided to enter religious life but was unsure which convent to join. Despite pressure from family members to enter the less ‘Strict and Rigorous’ Ghent Benedictines, she could not resist the Antwerp Carmelites after they brought her within the convent walls and several nuns entertained her.<sup>103</sup> Agnes Tasburgh professed at the Louvain Augustinians in 1622 because she desired to be in a fully enclosed community, rather than one with a reputation as ‘an open monastery’, like that entered by her cousin in Douai.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, Anne Ingleby explained in 1623 that she had joined the Brussels Benedictines thirteen years earlier because of the house’s reputation for strict enclosure.<sup>105</sup> Before entering the Paris Benedictines in 1664, Elizabeth Conyers started to experience doubts about actually following her planned vocation. The prioress, Bridget More, invited her to spend the night within the convent walls. Her obituary records that ‘soon after her coming in (contrary to her expectation) she found that heavy weight wherewith a little before she had been so soarily opprest, to fal off’ and she subsequently professed in the convent.<sup>106</sup> In the eighteenth century, the Bruges Augustinians allowed several potential recruits ‘to see our manner of life’; the community also allowed in a Scottish woman who was inclined to convert to Catholicism, underlining in a direct way how the nuns viewed enclosure as part of the wider mission of the Church, including that directed towards their Protestant homeland.<sup>107</sup>

English women religious could also be extremely inventive in the deployment of enclosure for their own ends, echoing Lehfeltdt’s suggestion that, for early modern Spanish convents, enclosure could be advantageous, offering ‘a source of strength and identity.’<sup>108</sup> As Cindy Carlson and Angela Weisl have recognized in the Middle Ages, thanks to their enclosed nature,

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<sup>103</sup> There is a hint that this was partly to snare such a high profile member: Daemen-de Gelder, ‘Life Writing II’, p. 193. See also Hallett, *Lives of Spirit*, pp. 87–8.

<sup>104</sup> Douai Abbey, C2, pp. 258–9.

<sup>105</sup> Walker, *Gender and Politics*, p. 51.

<sup>106</sup> CRS, vol. 9, p. 377.

<sup>107</sup> Bruges Annals 1, pp. 368–70; Bruges Annals 2, p. 238.

<sup>108</sup> Lehfeltdt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain*, p. 182.

nuns derived ‘authority and inspiration precisely because their exile from the secular community, real or figurative, accompanied by their special access to the divine, created spaces for self-articulation.’<sup>109</sup> In a case similar to those that can be found in Spain, Rome and Naples,<sup>110</sup> the Rouen Poor Clares fought to protect the integrity of their enclosure when a neighbour launched a law suit against them in the 1650s. Their neighbour wished to build a high tower right next to the convent walls, meaning he would be able to peer into the convent’s sacred space. At the insistence of the president of the Parlement, the neighbour was commanded to pull down the construction he had already begun and forbidden to attempt such work again.<sup>111</sup> Similarly, when the community was struck with the plague, the townsfolk complained that they had not built a ‘sickhouse’ sufficiently far from the main convent buildings in order to prevent contagion, thus putting at risk the community and anyone, such as the doctor, who had to enter the enclosure. In response, once the epidemic had passed, the community built a new infirmary in March 1669, which, advantageously for the nuns, meant taking more land within the convent walls, thus also providing space for the construction of an apothecary garden.<sup>112</sup> Even broken enclosure could be exploited where relations with the local populace were concerned. During building work in 1710, the Bruges Augustinians heard that a Corpus Christi procession was to pass the gate of their new garden. The canonesses asked if they could at least receive benediction at the gate, but the procession actually entered the open doorway and processed round the convent garden. The same happened during another procession in the evening, this time the nuns being better prepared ceremonially for the great number of seculars who took part in the parade.<sup>113</sup> Therefore, what could have been construed as an infringement of their rule instead became a moment of opportunity, the community

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<sup>109</sup> Cindy L. Carlson and Angela Jane Weisl, ‘Introduction’, in Cindy L. Carlson and Angela Jane Weisl (eds.), *Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), p. 5.

<sup>110</sup> For Spanish examples, see Lehfeldt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain*, p. 182; for Rome, see Marilyn Dunn, ‘Spaces shaped for spiritual perfection: convent architecture and nuns in Early Modern Rome’, in Helen Hills (ed.), *Architecture and the Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 161–3; for Naples, see Helen Hills, *Invisible City: the Architecture of Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Neapolitan Convents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 120–38.

<sup>111</sup> Bowden, ‘History Writing’, p. 49.

<sup>112</sup> Bowden, ‘History Writing’, p. 118. The community also built a new house for their confessor around the same time, despite opposition from local residents: Bowden, ‘History Writing’, pp. 118–9.

<sup>113</sup> Bruges Annals 1, pp. 276–7.

featuring prominently in the feast's celebrations, bringing them very much to the attention of the surrounding populace.

Like the female Franciscan community in Munich, who used the seal of enclosure to prevent the Franciscan provincial taking from them the relics of an early Christian martyr in 1662,<sup>114</sup> the Gravelines Poor Clares turned enclosure to their advantage in their disagreements with the English Franciscan friars. Following the foundation of the male Franciscan province after 1619, one of its members, Christopher Davenport, was intent on extending the friars' influence to include spiritual authority over the Gravelines Poor Clares. He asserted the right to inspect the convent, a claim the abbess, Elizabeth Tildesley, rejected. Davenport therefore sought to have Tildesley replaced and arrived at the convent gate with 'an army of Fryars' to achieve that purpose. Despite his fulminating and threats, the community used the rule of enclosure to refuse him access to the convent, thus maintaining their own independence in that particular instance.<sup>115</sup> In October 1720, the Bruges Augustinians used the rules of enclosure to keep out the secular authorities when a laysister, Clare Johnson, died following a fall whilst on an errand outside the convent. At the time, the magistrates were attempting to investigate any accidental death and levy a fine when it was proved. However, the community refused the investigators entry, saying they had no permission from the bishop to grant access. Once the magistrates left, the nuns had the deceased Johnson swiftly buried, thus thwarting the authorities. The bishop, Hendrik Jozef van Susteren, congratulated them on their actions, adding that as it was a matter of religion, it was his concern rather than that of the magistrates.<sup>116</sup> Ironically, in the 1730s, inverting the popular stereotype of forced enclosure, the Bruges Augustinians even offered refuge within the convent walls to a local laywoman who had attended their school and was wishing to escape a forced marriage that was being engineered for her.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Ulrike Strasser, 'Bones of Contention: Cloistered Nuns, Decorated Relics, and the Contest over Women's Place in the Public Sphere of Counter-Reformation Munich', *Archive for Reformation History*, 90 (1999), pp. 280–2.

<sup>115</sup> The battle with Davenport over who had authority over the convent was a long and complicated one: see Kelly, 'Convent Management', pp. 411–21; Caroline Bowden, 'Les Clarisses anglaises d'Aire-sur-la-Lys (1629–1799): stratégies d'une survie', *Etudes Franciscaines*, Nouvelle série, 5 (2012), fasc. 2, pp. 263–82. See also Walker, *Gender and Politics*, p. 49.

<sup>116</sup> Bruges Annals 1, pp. 374–5. The community attempted a similar trick in 1729, when local workmen wished to set off little fireworks in the convent garden, a local custom to mark the hundredth anniversary of a convent's foundation. The prioress, Lucy Herbert, did not fancy the noisy commotion and told them that the granting of permission was not her responsibility but the bishop's. Unfortunately for her, the men duly went to the Ordinary and successfully gained permission: Bruges Annals 1, p. 447.

<sup>117</sup> Bruges Annals 2, p. 37.

In conclusion, English women religious were able to negotiate the rules of enclosure themselves; they were not the victims of some draconian rule, nor were they inert objects passively receiving an external act. Roberta Gilchrist acknowledges that women were active in interpreting their surroundings but also ‘complicit in being governed by it’, she conceding that ‘the seclusion of women was sometimes a product of their own agency.’<sup>118</sup> This was certainly the case with English women religious, who used enclosure not only for their spiritual benefit but for the development of their social relations as well. Claire Walker is quite right to assert that ‘the nuns seemingly accepted clausura’s structural and postural confinement’,<sup>119</sup> but this can be taken further; rather than a lukewarm reception, it can instead be argued that the English convents positively embraced this Tridentine aspect of their identity. As Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin has pointed out in the case of English male religious orders, their houses had to be re-founded at the start of the seventeenth century so, by definition, were exposed to and shaped in the cauldron of radicalizing Catholic Reformation trends.<sup>120</sup> This was as true for English women religious as their male counterparts and its fruits can be witnessed in the nuns’ radically orthodox commitment to the terms of enclosure. Naturally, as in Spain, the application of the rule could be tweaked due to the intertwined issues of religious expression, monastic discipline and secular patronage.<sup>121</sup> In relation to the issue of patronage, this compromise manifested itself in the allowing of major benefactors to enter enclosure after the relevant permission had been sought from the bishop. Yet the fact that this was held as a special reward reflects how vigorously enclosure was observed. Such activities may have represented a breach of the letter of Tridentine law but English conventual observance of enclosure was more than just for image. As Weddle has argued in the Florentine context, convent architecture and adherence to the rule was designed to convey the nuns’ vocation and strict separation from the secular world. This division was meant to be seen, just as in the case of enclosed male houses, thus conversely boosting the inhabitants’ reputation as public intercessors.<sup>122</sup> The nuns may have originated

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<sup>118</sup> Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, p. 168.

<sup>119</sup> Walker, *Gender and Politics*, p. 51.

<sup>120</sup> Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, *Catholic Europe, 1592–1648: Centre and Peripheries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 36.

<sup>121</sup> Lehfeltdt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain*, p. 11.

<sup>122</sup> Weddle, “‘Women in wolves’ mouths”, pp. 123–4; Sherry C. M. Lindquist, ‘Women in the Charterhouse: the liminality of cloistered spaces at the Chartreuse de Champmol in Dijon’, in Hills, *Architecture and the Politics of Gender*, pp. 177–83; Lehfeltdt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain*, p. 13. As Nicky Hallett has acknowledged, nun writers wished to show the world that enclosure was voluntarily chosen and so were likely to stress the

from the continent's peripheries but their commitment to the Tridentine rules relating to enclosure was a defining characteristic of the English convents and one for which they became known in the wider Church.

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convents' commitment to the Tridentine decrees. However, other evidence – such as the external recognition of the English convents' commitment to enclosure – would suggest it was not mere window-dressing: Hallett, 'Life Writing I', p. xviii.

